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PSYCHOLOGICAL LITERATURE.

I.—THE NERVOUS SYSTEM.

The Nervous System and the Mind. A Treatise on the Dynamics of the Human Organism. CHARLES MERCIER. London and New York, 1888. 374 pp.

This book is the outcome of the feeling that the understanding of pathological states in the domain of psychiatry, as in all other domains which have such states, depends, in the first instance, on the grasp of what is normal. We must, in other words, study entire mental processes instead of attending to differences alone. There are three parts to the book ; Part first—The functions of the nervous system, physical and physiological—comprises about one third of the book ; Part second—Functions of the nervous system, psychological—about a quarter ; while the remainder of the book is given to the third part—Mind—and under this heading the main space is taken by a classification of the feelings.

Herbert Spencer and Hughlings-Jackson are the authorities to whom the author is most indebted, and he has certainly been greatly influenced by both. In the introduction his leading idea is laid down in the following form : “Having firmly and tenaciously grasped these two notions of the absolute separateness of mind and matter, and of the invariable concomitance of mental change with a bodily change, the student will enter on the study of psychology with half his difficulties already surmounted.” The interest of the author does not appear to be so strong in the physical portion as later on. The deductive physiology which is largely presented in the former is not satisfying. The similes and figures incident to that mode of treatment have a vicious way of getting more credit than is due them, and sometimes pose as real explanations, which cannot but be dangerous to the correct estimation of the argument involved. The avalanche theory, which is brought in from experimental physiology to support certain theoretical views, has been satisfactorily disproved, so that it should not be used for such a purpose.

In the physiological division, the presentation of the Jacksonian distinction of “central” and “peripheral,” as applied to movements, makes the important views of that author more accessible than hitherto.

In discussing the functions of the nervous system from a psychological point of view, the author takes up conduct, and, presenting it in an agreeable form and with the good English that characterizes the entire book, makes this portion most readable. The psychological function of the nervous system is defined as “the adjustment of processes that occur within the organism to conditions that exist outside of it.” These adjustments are discussed under the heads of their novelty, complexity, precision, and thriftiness.

In discussing mind, in the last part of the book, the Spencerian view of the proximate constituents as feelings and relations between feelings is the one accepted. Spencer's classification of cognitions is given and criticized at some length, and then follows a discussion of feeling and a classification of the feelings according to the author, which last comprises almost a quarter of the book. The principle of evolutionary differentiation on which the classification is based certainly commends itself, but whatever may be the value of the discussion, it does not seem to belong to the book, and is a far too special study to interest those who will be interested in the other parts.

As an expression of an earnest wish of a large number of alienists to place the study of mental disease on a better footing, the book is satisfactory, for the evident desire to go straight to the point, and the clear, untechnical character of the style, cannot fail to make it useful to those who have the slightest interest in such matters.

Ueber die Verrichtungen des Grosshirns. GOLTZ. Sechste Abhandlung. Pflüger's Archiv, Bd. 42, Heft 9 und 10.

It is now some four years since the fifth contribution of Goltz made its appearance in this same Archiv. Since that time there have been several papers from the Strassburg laboratory along this line. The present paper is subdivided under three general heads: First, the removal of an entire half of the cerebrum; second, the removal of large symmetrical portions in the frontal half of the cerebrum; third, removal of both occipital lobes. Under the first head, Goltz describes a dog which had lost one cerebral hemisphere, basal ganglia included. The animal with this extensive defect lived some fifteen months after the last operation. His condition is described as that of impaired sensibility and motility on the side opposite the lesion, but there was no complete loss of sensibility or paralysis to be anywhere observed. The animal has become a simpleton that never romps, shows no fear, is somewhat deaf, and hemianablyopic in its single eye (the eye on the side of the operation having been removed).

The simple fact that a dog can survive such a lesion is in itself a matter of interest. Goltz uses this case at the same time to support several lines of argument. In the first place, it has been often objected that his method of operating left parts of the various cortical centres which he claimed to have removed, and that this fact accounted for the retention of the functions which Goltz described. When an entire hemisphere is removed, this argument is answered, and yet the reactions of the dog were the same as in the cases where the objection had been urged. It has further been held by some investigators that the functions normally resident in the cortex passed, on removal of the cortex, to the basal ganglia. In this case there were no basal ganglia, so that some other explanation of the persistence of function is required.

The author then passes on to say that he has always believed in a very rough localization, at least to the extent that there was a difference between the function of the anterior and posterior portions of the forebrain. Whether the functions of the anterior portion of one hemisphere are represented by the corresponding centres of the other side he proposes to test by the removal of these portions on both sides. This brings him to the second head.